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I N A

L E T T E R

T O

SAMUEL JOHNSON, LL.D. *K*

Vast Bulks! which little souls but ill supply.

DRYDEN.

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MDCCLXXV.

A
L E T T E R
T O
SAMUEL JOHNSON, LL.D.

S I R,

IT cannot be denied, that he who publishes his speculations to the world, submits them to the animadversion of every reader; the following observations therefore on your *Tour to the Hebrides*, need little apology; that work containing remarks sufficient to move passions less *irritable* than those which commonly warm a Scotchman's breast; and the world will not be surprized to find, that he who is said to "prefer his country to truth," should prefer it also to prejudice, and to you.

B

I shall

I shall not endeavour to reduce to method what I have to say upon this occasion, but my remarks shall follow each other as nearly as possible, in the order of those observations which occasion them; and if, in imitation of so great a model, I should now and then quit the common path, “to view a solitary shrub, or a barren rock,” I hope for excuse.

A man is not likely to be a very unprejudiced traveller through a country which he has held for forty years in contempt: *ocular* demonstration may convince him that his opinions were erroneous, but *no* demonstration will oblige him to retract: he whose errors have acquired a kind of classic authority, will not easily confess one of so long a standing, though founded on misapprehension or mistake; and much less will he be inclined to retract an error which arose from the malice of his heart.

The contemptible ideas you have long entertained of Scotland and its inhabitants, have been too carefully propagated, not to be universally known; and those who read your *Journey*, if they cannot applaud your candour, must at least praise your consistency, for you have been very careful

careful not to contradict yourself. Your prejudice, like a plant, has gathered strength with age—the shrub which you nursed so many years in the hothouse of confidential conversation, is now become a full-grown tree, and planted in the open air.

I, Sir, who am almost as superstitious as yourself, could not help regarding your description of *Inch Keith*, the first object of your attention, as ominous of what was to follow. “*Inch Keith* is nothing more than a rock, covered with a thin layer of earth, not wholly bare of grass, and very fertile of thistles.” It immediately struck me, that your book would be something like this rock, “a barren work, covered with a thin layer of merit; not only void of truth, but very fertile of prejudice:”—how far it may agree with this description, those only who have seen what you have seen, can judge.

Immortal Buchanan! If yet thy sacred spirit has any influence on the scenes of thy earthly existence, let a blasting fog consume the present productions of that holy place, where thou wert wont to exalt thy Creator! And yet this, so much com-

plained of, vegetable congregation, may as much display the glory of God, and be as acceptable in His sight, as those who, though endowed with reason, “draw near him only with their lips, whilst their hearts are far from Him.” Let not him complain that an episcopalian chapel is turned into a green-house, who would not hesitate to convert a presbyterian kirk into a privy.

What can be said for the alienated college? do you think there are not professors sufficient for the students? if there be, surely they will not be less assiduous because they are better paid; the Scotch clergy do not become negligent of their duty in proportion as their income is augmented.

He who is determined to say whatever he can in prejudice of an object, will not only be apt to say untruths, but even improbabilities. When you said that “a tree might be a show in Scotland,” you certainly overshot your mark; such an assertion will never be believed, no, not though Dr. Johnson had sworn it. I will not say it is improbable you saw no trees, for much of the eastern coast of England, as well as of Scotland, is more naked of wood than the inland country; and the greater part of
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the road between Edinburgh and Inverness (at least the road which you travelled) is often upon the sands, and always near the sea. And yet I think you must have passed the Bridge of Don with your eyes shut. Middleton of Seaton took, perhaps, no notice of you ; and you in return, disdained to take notice of his beautiful seat, whose surrounding woods adjoin to that bridge.

You saw few trees in that part of Scotland through which you passed, and you modestly insinuate, there are none in Scotland ; a Scotchman who had traversed the north-west side of London, might affirm by the same rule, that there is not a corn field in England. Scotland, however, has its extensive and well-grown woods, as well as England ; and you might have reclined, in every county, under the oak or the pine of an hundred years old.

It must not be denied, that the north of Scotland is universally destitute of hedges ; for which I can recollect only one good reason. Hedges and trees are in general a mark of distinction peculiar to Gentlemen's seats : a farmer no sooner attempts to inclose his fields with a hedge, or ornament them with a row of trees, than he becomes the object of the Laird's jealousy or avarice ;

——he is supposed to be rich, his rent is raised, and he is compelled to the alternative of starving on his farm, or quitting it. To this may be added, that a farmer in Scotland is not allowed to lop even the wood which he has planted: the loppings, without which no farmers houses are built, must be purchased of the Laird at his own price.

You express much surprize, at finding an organ in the chapel at Montrose; somebody told you there were no organs in the Scotch Churches, and your own heart persuaded you, that Presbyterians would never suffer them to be erected among them, even in chapels; but you was agreeably deceived—you might have seen organs in the episcopalian chapels in Edinburgh, Montrose, Aberdeen, Banff, and I believe, Elgin, Inverness, and Stirling.

The Presbyterian has much less objection to an organ than is generally imagined; but many difficulties would attend an attempt to introduce them in Scotland.—Three-fourths of mankind will always be found averse to innovations in religion; because, three-fourths are incapable of judging of their propriety. In Scotland, the gentry and clergy almost universally practise mu-
sick;

sick: but there is nothing more religiously avoided on Sunday; and this habit of restraint is become a kind of prejudice, which it would be difficult to eradicate, and dangerous to break through. In nine out of ten parishes, they could neither afford to build an organ or pay an organist.

Boëthius, beside his forty marks, had probably a house, coals, and candles given him, and an annual gratuity from every student. A gentleman's son, at either of the universities of Aberdeen, divides from five to ten guineas among the professors annually.

Few of the Scotch ministers take the degree of Doctor: they are four years at the northern colleges before they can become graduates or Masters of Arts, and four years Students of Divinity before they can preach; they cannot enjoy a living till they have been examined by, and preached before, the Synod, to whose jurisdiction they belong. Few reflections can be cast on the indiscriminately bestowing degrees in Scotland, that will not be found equally applicable on the banks of the Cam or the Isis: a degree distinguishes, sometimes learning, and sometimes virtue; it is sometimes a sacrifice to friendship, and, perhaps, sometimes

sold for money.—“ Let him who is innocent cast the first stone.”

The great mass of nations, as you rightly observe, is neither rich nor gay :—and yet one would not judge of the opulence of London, by the inhabitants of St. Giles's; nor of English politeness, by the fishwomen of Billingsgate. Your observations on Banff are as untrue as illiberal ; the generality of their windows, are not such as you have described them ; nor are they often so remarkably frugal as to *splice their glass* : tho', by the bye, this art is not totally unknown in England, where one may often see windows filled with bladders, rags, and oiled paper. To descend to objects so trivial and minute, whilst the beautiful seats of the Earls of Fife and Findlater are passed by unnoticed, betrays a want of candour, for which I am unable to account, and for which, all your elegant remarks on the ranks in society will not be a sufficient excuse. But, perhaps, at Banff, they offered you neither honours nor entertainment.

A cathedral in ruins, like a Belisarius in distress, cannot but affect the heart of every spectator : such a spectacle produces in the mind, that kind of pain which arises from the visible conviction of the inefficacy of wishes,

wishes, which yet we cannot relinquish: we would restore it to its ancient grandeur, though we feel we cannot; and we experience all the mortification of disappointment, where we never had the smallest reason to hope.

A building in Scotland appropriated to the worship of God, should that worship be by any accident discontinued, must soon begin to decay: the idea of pollution is there carried to a very great height. About the year 1744, a small chapel was built at Huntly, for the use of the episcopal inhabitants; while it was yet so incomplete as to have neither doors nor windows, a few of the pretender's army used it as a cook's shop; in consequence of which, it stands at this hour just as they left it, an empty shell.

Where a Cathedral can be made useful, as at Glasgow and Old Aberdeen, it will be preserved; but where it stands the useless monument of antiquity, it cannot be supported but by the hand of opulence.

Orchards are not very common on the north and east of Scotland; but apples, pears, and cherries are found in every gentleman's garden, the same as in England;

land: in the shire of Angus, they are as well cultivated, and almost as common, as in Herefordshire. You saw none, because you did not go where they are; but an orchard will no more make a shew in Scotland than a tree.

“ How the Scotch lived without kail,” you say, “ it is not easy to guess; and “ when they had not kail, they probably “ had nothing.” How such an assertion should flow from the philosophic pen of Dr. Johnson, it is not indeed *easy to guess*. Prejudice and ill-nature may give birth to misrepresentation and falsehood; but Absurdity must be the child of Ignorance or of Folly. Who, but a Lunatic, would affirm, that because men did not use animal-food before the flood, they lived upon air? Surely the English had something before they had roast-beef; and I am persuaded the Scotch eat before the days of O. Cromwell.

Cabbage or kail is to be found in every farmer's garden in Scotland, and they make a considerable part of his family support. He has also his turnips, potatoes, onions, carrots, and parsnips. That the labouring and the poorer inhabitants beyond the Tweed live, in a great measure,

fure, upon vegetables, neither can, nor need, be denied: when the whole of their food was confined to the produce of their fields, their rivers, and their seas, though they were not rich, they were happy. The farmer's black cattle supplied him with milk, butter, and cheese, and enabled him to pay his rent;—he covered himself with fleeces from his own flock, and brought up a family of robust and useful subjects, whose ambition seldom soared above the most honourable as well as most necessary of employments, *Tilling the ground*. Unfortunately for that country, and perhaps for this, a much more luxurious taste begins to prevail: the farmer who, a few years ago, was used to satisfy his hunger with an oaten cake, and his thirst at a neighbouring spring, brews, now, strong beer, and *kills his own mutton*. Contentment, the sweetest and most natural companion of pastoral life, has almost fled the country.—A pernicious ambition prevails; and the parents, who are now dropping into their graves, have the mortification to see themselves deserted by their children, on whom the love of novelty and ambitious hopes have prevailed, to quit the fertile fields and simple sufficiency of their progenitors, for the uncertain productions of the barren wilds of America.

America. Small obligation therefore are they under for that elegance and culture, which you say they owe to the English; and little reason has England to boast of promoting any improvement, by which her revenue is lessened, and her subjects diminished.

To insinuate that the northern rivers are destitute of fish, because fish are not seen in fording, is the story of the Tree repeated. Trouts are so plenty in almost every stream in Scotland, that they are of very little estimation: they are to be found in such abundance, even in the small streams that flow from the mountains, that shepherds often catch them with the hand. To assert facts, upon mere appearances, is seldom just, and always dangerous.

The houses in Scotland are not *stones piled up without mortar*, unless you refuse the name of mortar to every thing but lime. The farmers houses are built in general of stones cemented with well-tempered clay.

The story of the half-crown and the milk at Auknashials, whether it be told to expose the poverty of the country, or display your generosity, is very unworthy

worthy of a philosopher. Wealth and Poverty are always judged of by comparison: the former is not always a mark of merit, nor the latter of reproach: he is just as rich who wants nothing, as he who has more than he wants; and there was a time, when half a crown was no inconsiderable object even to Dr. Johnson—a time ere sloth was taught to glitter under the rays of royal munificence, and when the morning lucubration produced the evening meal.

“ The manners of mountaineers are,” you say, “ commonly savage.”—I am not sure if this can be proved, unless all manners are to be called savage, in proportion as they differ from our own; but perhaps manners ought not to be judged of by comparison. All societies are polite among themselves: I believe, there are none so rude where the reciprocal duties are not performed, and where there are not some known rules, by which the civilities of life are displayed. The touch of an Indian’s head, or a Highlander’s bonnet, is as polite where it is practised, as an Englishman’s bow, or a Frenchman’s cringe. If manners were to be estimated by the principles which gave them birth, or by the consequences they produce in life, it
were

were not unworthy a Rambler to decide, which ought to be preferred, those of the rough mountainer, who sacrifices a desire of pleasing to candour, or those of the polished Parisian, who sacrifices every thing to a desire to please.

Mountaineers are not thievish because they are poor: they seldom extend their ideas beyond the necessaries of life;—these they in general possess; and they cannot be called poor, who have all they wish for.

Among the Scotch Highlanders, it was not uncommon for the idle and the wicked of a clan, to associate themselves together and rob their enemies; they soon became thieves, both by principle and habit, and made depredations on Lowlanders, because they esteemed them, as the Catholics formerly did the Protestants, a degenerate race, with whom no faith was to be kept, and to whom no mercy should be shewn. But, perhaps, nothing so much promoted the thievish disposition of the Highlanders, as the impossibility, arising from their distance from the seat of government, of procuring any other redress for injuries than retaliation. He who has been robbed by his neighbour, will seldom rest satisfied, tho' his loss be made up; for compensation will

will not always obliterate injury: he will not be over-careful to proportionate the reparation to the offence, when he is to be the sole judge of both: he very naturally becomes the aggressor in his turn; and those hands seldom return to the plow or the spade, which have been accustomed to reap where they did not sow.

“ He who travels through *any* country, “ may easily *saturate his soul*” with contradictory information, if he have neither opportunity, sagacity, nor inclination, to discover the truth. I could have excused your want of all these, but I wish you had employed in their place a little common sense. The Highlander’s information with respect to Brogues was contradictory, and you therefore insinuate that they are universally liars: you forget that whilst you gratify spleen, you display folly; for who would expect a detail of our woolen manufactory from a farmer, or of the art of ship-building from a sailor? and yet the one has passed his life in a ship, and the other always worn a coat.

Nor are the Highlanders to be branded with ignorance, unless you will allow that you are ignorant, because you cannot tell how the leather of your shoes is tanned,
or

or how your hat is made of the hairs that compose it. Such bare-faced insinuations, whether they be the “refuge of spleen, or “the sports of ill-nature,” are equally illiberal and contemptible.

Brogues are made of hides tanned with the bark of oak or birch, but much oftener of fallow—they were never perhaps made by the wearer in any part of Scotland: the highlander is generally supplied with them in the Lowland fairs, where they are sold from two to four shillings a pair; and though they are tied with strings instead of being buckled, they defend the feet both from stones and water. When the highlander wore brogues of his own making, they were probably pieces of untanned hides tied round his feet.

The acts of burning the dead, and of piling stones on the grave, were never I believe united in the north of Scotland. Cairns have been accumulated over the grave of *many*, as well as of *one*; for where they have been removed by the curious, the bones of sometimes one person, sometimes many, have been discovered. I saw, upon the removal of a Cairn on the top of a hill in Banffshire, some stones discovered, which formed a rude coffin, containing
several

several human bones, apparently intire, but they would not bear the touch. Cairns are still formed over the grave of the Suicide; they are increased daily, from superstitious motives, by an additional stone from the passing school-boy, or neighbouring shepherd.

Your reasoning in favour of the Tacksmen or Great Farmers, is much more specious than convincing: the inhabitants of Scotland, who alone can speak from experience, have long considered them as drones that devour the labour of the industrious.—But a philosopher pervades vulgar errors, and overthrows the experience of ages.—And yet, I fear, it will be no very easy task to persuade a Scotch farmer of the use and necessity of a set of superiors, whose laziness he must feed, and from whom he has nothing to hope, but every thing to fear: neither will he perceive the similarity between a Tacksman and the manager of an iron foundry; he will rather compare him to one of those evil spirits of whom you heard in the Hebrides, whose malignant influence must be deprecated by giving much, lest he should take all.

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The Tackfman has for these twenty years, been the pest of the north of Scotland; he is generally *a bastard of nature, adopted by fortune*; one who has obtained wealth, not by merit, but by accident, or by crimes; he takes the advantage of that thirst of money, which a taste for extravagance and modern refinement has introduced among the Scotch gentry; by overbidding, he joins the possessions of the old tenants, who must either become tenants to him, or seek new possessions in the wilds of America.

I deviate a little from the plan on which I set out, to observe, that it need not be matter of wonder, if he who has been long accustomed to a familiar intercourse with his Chief, whom alone he acknowledged as a master, should rather “listen
“ to the tale of fortunate islands and happy
“ regions, where every man may have
“ land of his own, and eat the product
“ of his labour without a superior,” than submit to the caprice of a stranger and an oppressor.

That the late emigrations from Scotland have arisen in a great measure from the junction of farms, and the too sudden
and

and unreasonable rise of rents, cannot be doubted; the voice of the American Syren has not been confined to the Hebrides; it has been heard with too much pleasure in many parts of the Lowlands; and many a one has listened to the sound, because he felt himself degraded and disgraced, in being obliged to leave the Landlord he had been taught to honour, the meadows where his children had wandered, and the fields which his manhood had tilled; to depart from the sociable neighbour, the faithful friend, the fond brother or the dutiful child; and seek a new habitation, with a bended body and a breaking heart.

Those who conceive that any thing less than *positive evil* is sufficient to drive the peasant from the fields of his nativity, are little acquainted with natural life. He who can quietly continue the course of life which he has hitherto pursued, will not take a wife by his side, and a child on his back, to go in search of "bright suns, "calm skies, flowery fields, and fragrant "gardens," of which he can have no idea. Curiosity may tempt the informed and the young to wander from Kingdom to Kingdom, if they have or can procure the means of subsistence; but necessity alone can compel him to quit his habita-

tion, and seek an unknown shore, whose knowledge of the world is confined to the parish of his birth, and on whose daily labour a family defends.

Divide the possessions of the great farmers—let those who till the ground enjoy the pre-eminence to which they have ever been accustomed, of paying their rents to their Lairds in person—let their rents be raised only in proportion to the increase of money—and give them proper Leases of what they hold—you will then soon perceive how ineffectual every means will prove to draw them from their mountains and their glens.

Some persons of property, and some far removed from poverty, have emigrated; but it must be remembered, that poverty is not in Scotland so powerful a motive as *disgrace*, some degree of which has always been affixed to the man who has been turned out of his possession, either because he could not, or would not, pay the rent required. An old man, now in his 75th year, remembers the time when there were only two families in the parish in which he was born, to which he was not related by birth or marriage—the young Laird, to whom the parish belongs,

belongs, succeeded his father about twenty years ago, and raised the rents near one-third—the old man was obliged to quit his farm, and he has not at this hour fix relations in the parish.

This subject might be quitted with pleasure, were it not necessary to turn back and lament, with you, the consequences which followed the footsteps of a *vindictive conqueror*. So much pains have been taken of late to discover occasion for national reproach, that we need not wonder if the Scotch have been often told of the rebellion of 45, by those who knew nothing of that, or of them: and yet those who know the truth, know, that none but the Catholicks, the poor, the profligate, and the desperate, were the rebellious, and that no greater calamity ever befel that country. The laws which obliged the highlander to relinquish his dress, and deliver up his sword, were *then* perhaps necessary, but they could never be just, unless it can be proved that the greater number of those whom they affected, had merited the punishment. Suppose the numbers who bore arms on either side to be equal, surely those who remained neuter, ought not to have been accounted enemies, and much less those

who were on the side of Loyalty: such laws were therefore unjust, because, “ though Good cannot be complete, it “ ought to be predominant.”

But these Laws were certainly both unjust and impolitic: it is childish to talk of the inconvenience of a dress to which we have been accustomed from our infancy: how can any one assert that the plaid, which is a covering by night as well as by day, is less convenient for a soldier than the spare frock which scarcely reaches to his mid thigh? To the plaid the highlander was accustomed—he procured it at a small expence, for his wife or his sister made it.—Tell me, then, ye sage and loyal politicians, what great benefit does his Majesty George the Third reap from that Law, which obliges a number of his bravest subjects to wear a habit to which they have not been used, and to purchase it by stinting that body of food, which it was meant to cover!

The Law which disarmed the highlanders has not abated *the opinion* of their “ military importance” only, but that military importance itself: they form no longer that formidable phalanx which dea h
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alone could break through, but are now as timid, and as fond of life, and as swift to fly, as any of the "plump sons of the South." The knowledge of the Glamore was, till fatal 45, the highlander's amusement and pride: his sons could scarcely walk, ere they were taught to grasp the wooden sword, and maintain the ideal combat; and thus was formed a hardy and intrepid race, unaccustomed from their infancy to fear, and regardless of danger and of death. But now the highlander walks his heath, thoughtless of conquest and of arms; and his children tend his scanty flock, or seek a more friendly clime, where daily labour may procure them the weather-proof garment and the full meal. It cannot be expected that the veteran highlander, who was constrained to lay down the sword of loyalty, and subjected to equal punishment with the rebellious, should be over-solicitous to re-assume his post in the hour of danger, or to teach his children subjection to the ungrateful. Nor will he, who has nothing to hope or to fear from his Chief, sacrifice convenience, interest, or inclination, to implicit obedience, or the love of glory: the late amiable Earl of Sutherland was perhaps the last of Chiefs, who will be

able to raise a regiment on his own estate; and we shall never more hear that of 1200 highlanders sent to America, 76 only survived to "see their country again." The highlands of Scotland may owe perpetual safety to their poverty and rocky shores, and the inhabitants can feel little anxiety about losing possessions which they are no longer allowed to defend; but the time may come when we shall be constrained to allow, that their tranquillity is but a wretched recompense for their ancient martial spirit. The Conqueror, who dips his laurels in the blood of innocence, may break the spirit of the vanquished, but can never win their hearts—

———Who overcomes
By force, hath overcome but half his foe.

Milton, P. L. B. i.

I am sorry to find that Dr. Johnson's dislike to Presbyterianism should raise in him so strong an antipathy to Presbyterians themselves: to dispute about modes of public worship, seems to be beneath so great a philosopher—to dislike a man because he worships after this or that mode, is unworthy the dignity of a rational creature. I believe I may venture
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to affirm, that the ministers of the Hebrides never once wished *you* had been a Presbyterian: perhaps they know but little, but he is uncommonly ignorant, who does not know, that it is the *matter*, and not the *manner*, of worship which merits regard; and that the gates of Heaven are open to the Presbyterian as well as to the Episcopalian. There may be others in the world, as well as you, who would confine all Possibility of Salvation to those of their own persuasion; if there be, God can forgive them, as he did the woman taken in adultery, or the thief on the cross; but surely such persons will be held less excuseable, in the minds of reasonable men, than the unhappy wretch, who yielded to the weakness of nature; or than he who stole to support it.

For the pagan world we ought to pray, but with fellow-christians we should reason: and what stronger motives have we for disliking the man who prays *extempore*, or *standing*, than him whose palate differs from our own? It is by no means improbable, but the instantaneous and heart-felt ejaculation of the Presbyterian, may be as rational and as acceptable in the sight of God, as the incomprehensible Creeds and vain Repetitions of the Episcopalian.

palian. If there be any of a different opinion, they must have wretched notions of God's *Justice*, which certainly *ought*, and certainly will make all proper allowance for the prejudices of education and of habit; but nothing less than an exertion of his *Mercy* can obliterate the malice of the heart: let us not curse whom God hath not cursed; he may be the God of the Jew and of the Greek, of the Episcopalian and Presbyterian, but not of the Bigoted and Uncharitable.

That "the Scottish Doctors would gladly admit a Form of Prayer," though it remains to be proved, is not very improbable; but it must be a Form of their own contrivance. So sensible are they, that they can "compose by study and meditation a better prayer than will rise in their minds at a sudden call," that none but the obstinate and the fanatical offer Petitions, or deliver Sermons, which they have not written and studied beforehand: the only difference between the Scotch and English Clergy, in this particular, is, that the latter read from the Pulpit what they have written; whilst the former repeat what, with a greater degree of diligence, they have learned by heart. The Lord's Prayer is not suffered, or rejected, by congregational

gregational caprice, but is introduced, or omitted, at the preacher's pleasure. It is the first thing which a Presbyterian's child is taught by heart.

By the more sensible among the Scotch, the *Second-sight* was, perhaps, never believed: the Highland Seers, with the English Conjurors, have generally been esteemed a set of men, whose abilities were sufficient to impose on the credulous and ignorant, and whose consciences permitted them to reap the fruits of imposture without remorse.

To prove that the *Second-sight* does *not* exist, were perhaps as difficult as to prove that it *does*: as it is said to be an involuntary perception, perhaps it is a kind of waking dream. All dreams of possible accidents may, probably, be somewhere realized; the corresponding event falls sometimes within the dreamer's observation, and hence claims his more immediate regard. The Seer, in revolving many possible events that may befall his friends or himself, may now and then be uncommonly struck with some, which, though they seem very improbable, may yet happen: and this may be the case with
such

such as boast neither singular qualities nor superior assistance.

It must not be granted, that “no profit is sought or gained,” by pretension to second sight: the Scotch Seers are respected, feared, and paid by those who give credit to their pretensions, or solicit their assistance; they are not therefore without temptation to feign, nor their hearers without motives to encourage the imposture; for imposture and credulity are always reciprocal. The second-sighted gentleman in the highlands is most probably an Hypochondriac.

I am not much surprized, that he who is “willing to believe” the reality of the second sight, should be *willing to deny* the antiquity of Ossian’s Poems: an advocate for improbability may very naturally contradict demonstration. What pity it is, that *Singularity*, which has been so long the peculiar characteristic of Dr. Johnson, does not always side with virtue and with truth! but some men had rather be esteemed singular than wise. That superior pride is sometimes the offspring of superior attainments, and arrogance as commonly the attendant of learning as of ignorance, are truths too humiliating to human nature,
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and too easy to be proved from every page of your Tour. To ascribe the poems of Ossian to Macpherson, is to "*sin against the clearest light*:" that they were written before he was born, might be (nay has been) proved by a cloud of witnesses; but it is unnecessary to produce evidence which you are determined not to believe, and it is as useless and imprudent to reason with one who will *hear no reason*, as with one who *has none*. But were the point to be disputed with one whose learning and prejudice had not yet shut his ears against conviction—with any one but Dr. Johnson, or an idiot—I should be prompted to ask, what temptation have the gentry of the Hebrides to assert the originality of the poems in question, against conviction? Ossian celebrates neither their Clans, their Chiefs, nor their country. What can induce the Clergy to promote an imposture, which increases neither their stipend, influence, nor fame? They, by your own account, are the indefatigable enemies of every kind of superstition, and consequently not very likely to treat Ossian with too much veneration.

What motives can be found to induce Macpherson to father his works upon Ossian? Is all their merit confined to the idea
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of their antiquity? Can he, by so doing, promote his interest, his fame, or the good of his country? Is he become famous, or rich, as the translator? And would he have been less so as the author? He might certainly have saved himself the expence, time, and trouble, of visiting the Hebrides. Had Macpherson published Ossian's poems as his own, may not one affirm, without any disparagement to his abilities, that few would have believed him? They contain as many internal marks of antiquity, and are so destitute of every allusion to modern life, that none but the credulous, or the ignorant, can suppose any man living capable of composing them: Scotch evidence would soon have detected the imposture; and Scotch evidence would have had, in that case, sufficient weight, even with Dr. Johnson,—for it would have contradicted Macpherson.

It has been said, to invalidate the authenticity of the poems in question, that they could not possibly be composed in an age so ignorant as was that of Ossian, when the art of writing was yet unknown: but when we suppose an age to have been intellectually ignorant, in proportion as it more immediately succeeded the age of nature—or because its manners differed from our own—or because it was ignorant of many

many modern inventions, we perhaps err: it must not be allowed, that superior parts have been bestowed in proportion to the convenience with which they might be exerted; they have appeared during every stage of human improvement, and I am not certain if an age like that of Ossian be not even more propitious to the Muses than one like the present.

It is well known, that the age of Homer was not the most polished, and yet Dr. Blackwell has ascribed much of his merit as a poet, to that age: every one who has tasted of the beauties of Homer, or of Ossian, will readily agree, upon comparing them with the productions of our more polished moderns, that in giving up nature and strength, for regularity and delicacy, we have made a wretched exchange.

Homer wrote his celebrated poems when the art of transcribing was well understood, and although they existed principally in the memory of Ballad-singers for three hundred years, their authenticity has never been doubted.—Ossian composed a variety of poems, which, taken together, are not so long as the Iliad, in an age when every thing was trusted to memory, because nothing was written—when, next to that
of

of bearing arms, the most honourable employment was to compose or repeat the song of Love or War;—when the bard's profession was not only honourable, but advantageous;—when he was not the needy wandering minstrel, but his Chief's most respected attendant;—and who was succeeded at death by one regularly accomplished to supply his place;—and yet, it has been said, that, supposing these poems to have been written by Ossian, they could not possibly have been remembered.

The following syllogistical kind of deduction seems to contain all you have said on the subject, and as it seems to be new, I hope no one will deny you the honour of having first discovered it—"Those who
 " can neither read nor write, can neither
 " reflect nor remember. In the days of
 " Ossian, the inhabitants of the Hebrides
 " could neither read nor write—ergo, the
 " poems ascribed to Ossian, were written
 " by James Macpherson, Esq."

And unless it be true, that "poems not
 " written cannot be retained by memory," what avails all that you have said about MSS? it can only prove (if it can prove any thing) that the Highland MSS. and consequently Ossian's poems, were written
 in

in *Irish* and not in *Erse*.—Now almost every one knows, that the *Erse* and *Irish* are so nearly alike, that the one is but a corruption of the other, and that he who can speak or write the one, can speak and write the other well enough to be understood. Martin did not write *Erse*, nor did any other writer for some time after him:—when any one wrote of the language of the Highlanders, it was generally called *Irish*, or *Erse*, by way of definition.

It is said, “ the English ought not
 “ to be influenced by Scotch authority,
 “ because *the Lowlanders are as ignorant*
 “ *of the Erse language as ourselves.*” You
 would have saved yourself the confusion
 of face, which a retrospect of this ridiculous
 remark must occasion, if you had taken
 the trouble to look into Dr. Blair’s
 essay, for you would have instantly perceived,
 that all his authority is drawn from the
 Highlands. With respect to the question
 which you say you put to the minister of
 Sky, one would rather wonder that a gentleman
 asked it, than that it was not answered. Silence
 is surely the most proper answer to the
 questions of the rude and impertinent.

D

Much

Much might be added—but perhaps too much has been said on the subject already—permit me however to mention, that, as an opponent to Dr. Johnson, I feel myself peculiarly happy in the support of Gray and Warton: writers, whose opinions, though they may not be sufficient to bias the Doctor, will have more weight with better men: writers, whose works will flourish in the sun, long after the illiberal pages of a “*Voyage to the Hebrides*” shall have withered in the shade of oblivion. I conclude with a parody on your own words, *—“To propagate error, by refusing evidence, is a degree of insolence with which the world was not *till now* acquainted; but stubborn audacity, is the last refuge of detection.”

These are far from being all the observations which a more attentive perusal of your book might have given birth to; but these will perhaps be sufficient to convince the unprejudiced, that veracity and candour are not always to be expected from grey hairs. Should they prompt some abler pen to vindicate a country and a people, which you have taken so much

* See page 274.

pains to asperse, they will not have been written in vain.

Of all the various readers into whose hands your book may fall, it is almost impossible to say to whom it can prove useful, unless it be to him who would perfect himself in the illiberal art of insinuation, or to him who loves to accumulate subjects for national abuse. To the former it will be a complete manual; and there is hardly a misfortune, a folly, or a vice, that it will not enable the latter to ascribe to *poor Scotland*, on the indubitable authority of Dr. Johnson. Let him, then, who may in future have occasion to prove that a Scotchman is poor, dirty, lazy, foolish, ignorant, proud, an eater of kail, a liar, a brogue-maker, or a thief; and that Scotland is a barren wilderness; let him apply to your book, for there he will find ample authority.

“ You had long desired,” you say, “ to visit Scotland;” the desire was invidious, for it was to discover the nakedness of a sister. The flame of national rancour and reproach has been for several years but too well fed—you too have added your faggot, and well deserved the thanks of your friends;

friends; but whether you have merited those of the Scotchman who procured you the means of subsistence, or of the Monarch by whose bounty you are fed, is a question which your own conscience must determine.

impossible to try to whom it is useful, unless it be to him who would perfect himself in the liberal art of imagination, or to him who loves to acquire minute subjects for national abuse. To the former it will be a complete manual; and there is hardly a misfortune, a folly, or a vice, that it will not enable the latter



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"You had long believed," you say, "to the Scotchman," the debt was enormous, for it was to fill over the nakedness of a sister. The flame of national rancour and reproach has been for several years but too well fed—you too have added your share, and well deserved the thanks of your friends.

